

ANNOTATED LIST OF THE BIRDS OF LOUGH CARRA

Last updated June 2012

This list includes all species for which we have found records, together with those from our own observations since 2000. We have compared the recent records with those of Ruttledge (1929) in order to give some indication of changes that have occurred over around eighty years. These changes are often a result of changing agricultural practices and land use patterns. If a species appears to have the same status as reported by Ruttledge, no comparison is made.

The list includes 138 species, of which at least 83 have been recorded as breeding on or near the lake.

Great northern diver

Seen occasionally during winter months (e.g. IWeBS counts in 2002 and 2010); Ruttledge noted that it occurred on Lough Mask.

Little grebe

Resident and breeding in small numbers. There are usually between 20 and 30 individuals on the lake in late autumn/early winter (with a recent highest count of 34), but numbers usually dwindle as the winter progresses. Meehan (see his thesis on this website) estimated the breeding population to be around 6 pairs but noted that this was possibly an underestimate. Even so, it is not an abundant species on Lough Carra.

Great crested grebe

Resident, summer visitor and passage migrant in spring. There is a breeding “colony” close to the gull colony islands just South of the Kilkeeran peninsula, with up to six or seven pairs nesting in close proximity to each other. Meehan (see his thesis on this website) estimated the lake’s total breeding population to be 7-10 pairs in 2005 and 13 pairs in 2006.

The spring passage is often very noticeable, with up to 42 recorded in March, most of them in pairs and displaying courtship behaviour.

Black-necked grebe

One record in September 2005 just South of Castle Carra.

Cormorant

Common and regular visitor to the lake throughout the year, with up to at least thirty or forty at any one time. They also use some of the islands as communal roosts sometimes with a maximum count of 55 at Cloonee on 27 August 2003, although they no longer breed on the lake as was the case during Ruttledge's time when he noted that they "breed in trees on Hag Island, Lough Carra, in great numbers".

Little Egret

Rare visitor, but perhaps likely to be seen more often as this species expands its range. One reliable record of two birds seen at Kilkeeran on 19 July 2008, with a possible record of one bird seen in the same area in 2007. Local (unconfirmed but reliable) information suggests they are now (2012) regular visitors.

Great white egret

Extremely rare visitor with just one record of a bird seen at Kilkeeran on 3 and 4 June 2012.

Grey heron

Regular visitor in small numbers throughout the year, but they no longer breed on the lake. Ruttledge (1929) reported that there was a heronry of 18 nests on Gleneary Island (as well as one nest on Castle Island), but this is no longer the case, and there has been no evidence of herons breeding on the lake for at least the last twelve years although an observation of two very recently fledged juveniles (with an adult) at Annie's in May 2012 suggests that they might now breed nearby. The number counted during the regular IWeBS surveys has never exceeded four since 2000-2001.

Mute swan

Resident, breeding population of a few pairs (Meehan estimated around five pairs in 2005 and 2006 – see his thesis on this website). Maximum count in recent years was 22 in February 2006 (including juveniles). It is probable that breeding success has been reduced through predation by mink on cygnets.

Bewick's swan

Reported by Stronach to be an occasional winter visitor, there have been no records since 1995.

Whooper swan

Occasional winter visitor in small numbers. During the extremely harsh winter of 2010-2011, a large flock (up to 100?) was seen in fields at Burriscarra.

Greenland white-fronted goose

Occasional or perhaps regular winter visitor. A flock of up to fifty or sixty birds used to visit the Kilkeeran peninsula occasionally during most winters, but has not been seen in recent years.

Greylag goose

Not recorded from 1995 to 2009, but noted by Stronach (1981) as a regular visitor in small numbers (4-5) and now (2012) resident and breeding in Quinn's Bay. A small flock (up to around eight individuals) can often be seen in this area.

Barnacle goose

Very rare visitor. A single record on 15 May 2005.

Wigeon

Regular winter visitor in variable numbers. Maximum winter counts since 2000 have varied from 43 to 313. Since Ruttledge (1929) reported that it was a "very plentiful winter visitor", it seems likely that there has been a decline in numbers since then. Counts in the 1970s were also very variable, although the highest number in that period was close to 600 in January 1974.

Gadwall

Not recorded at all on Lough Carra by Ruttledge (1929), it is now a resident in small numbers and a winter visitor in significant numbers. The maximum winter count in recent years was 82, and there have often been at least 60 birds present each winter (although numbers in 2006-2007 dropped to just 34). However, breeding was suspected in 2005 with two pairs present and was confirmed in 2006 (see Chris Meehan's thesis on this website) when a brood of four ducklings was seen with an adult at Moorehall. Two broods of gadwall ducklings were also seen at Moorehall in July 2008, since when they appear to have become regular breeders there. Also, there is usually a pair in the Kilkeeran area in the breeding season, although ducklings have not been seen there.

Teal

Resident in very small numbers and regular winter visitor, although in numbers greatly reduced over the last twenty years. Maximum winter count since 2000 was 98. No successful breeding has been recorded in recent years and, with American mink established on and around the lake, it seems unlikely that the resident population will survive much longer. Ruttledge (1929) noted that it was “resident” and “very numerous in winter”.

Mallard

Common resident, but greatly reduced in numbers over the last twenty years. The highest count since 2000 was 351 in the winter of 2003-2004, but most winters see a peak of only around 100-200 birds. This compares with the maximum counts of well over 2,000 in the 1970s. Furthermore, the number of breeding pairs on the lake has declined by around the same proportion. It seems probable that these catastrophic declines are due to a combination of predation by American mink, reduction in food supply as a result of decreased tillage in the area, drainage of wetlands around the lake and changes in habitats. For much more detail on this, see Chris Meehan’s thesis, the 2009 paper by Meehan et al., and the report “Where have all the mallard gone”: all on this website.

Pintail

No recent records of this species, but recorded by Ruttledge (1929) as a visitor in April and May. He suspected that they might breed, but found no evidence of this.

Blue-winged teal

One record of this North American vagrant in October 2007 at Kilkeeran.

Green-winged teal

One record only of this vagrant: Stronach ringed one at Kilkeeran in January 1969.

Shoveler

Winter visitor in variable numbers, but much reduced since the 1970s. Maximum count in recent years was 61, compared with 500 in 1974. There is also the possibility that it is or may become a breeding resident since a pair was present at Kilkeeran on 29 May 2007. Interestingly, Ruttledge (1929) reported that it was found nesting on Lough Carra in 1917 and that “They nest in bogs bordering Lough Carra and elsewhere”. So, the species has been a breeding resident in the past, and the presence of a pair in the breeding season in 2007 suggests that it might re-establish itself, although the continuing presence of American mink may prevent successful breeding.

Pochard

Regular winter visitor, but in much reduced numbers in recent years. From 1967 to 1977, maximum winter counts averaged nearly 500, whereas from 1995 to 2006 the average maximum was around 50. In contrast, the species was never recorded on Carra by Ruttledge (1929).

Tufted duck

Resident in quite good numbers (perhaps as many as 40-50 pairs) and regular winter visitor in numbers up to around 300. The breeding population now seems to be centred on the bay south of the Kilkeeran peninsula. However, breeding success appears to be very low (see Chris Meehan's thesis on this website). Ruttledge (1929) also found it to nest commonly on the islands of Lough Carra.

Scaup

Rare winter visitor with just one record in January 1995 and a further possible (but unconfirmed) sighting in the winter of 2011/2012.

Long-tailed duck

Not recorded by Ruttledge (1929) and seen occasionally over the last twelve years, this species occurred in small numbers in the winters of the 1970s, usually after severe storms (Stronach, 1981).

Common scoter

Very occasional visitor. There have been just a few records of this species on Lough Carra, although an unsuccessful breeding attempt was reported in 1969 (Stronach, 1981). Common scoters breed on Loughs Corrib and Conn, so it is conceivable that they might try on Lough Carra. However, it is also known that American mink have had a major negative impact on the breeding populations on these other loughs, so it is unlikely that they would be successful on Lough Carra under the present conditions. The only recent record was of a single bird in December 2002.

Goldeneye

It seems probable that this species has become much more abundant over the last eighty years since Ruttledge (1929) reported that he had never seen it on Lough Carra, although he also noted that "It is said, on doubtful authority, to frequent Carras Lough in winter and early spring". It is now a regular winter visitor with peak numbers of

around 100-150 in recent years, roughly the same as reported by Stronach (1981) in the 1970s.

Smew

Winter visitor in very small numbers (just one or two) in recent years (2003, 2004 and 2007).

Red-breasted merganser

Ruttledge (1929) noted that it “Breeds commonly on Loughs Carra and Mask, and is increasing”. It is now an uncommon resident and winter visitor, with a very few pairs attempting breeding. Meehan (2007) estimated that seven pairs attempted nesting in 2005, and five pairs in 2006. Breeding success appeared very low with only one brood of ducklings seen in 2005 and two broods in 2006. In 1968 and 1969, Stronach’s work (1981) suggested a breeding population of 20-25 pairs. Overall, it seems probable that there has been a substantial decline in this species on Lough Carra.

Osprey

Probably an occasional visitor but under-recorded. One was seen hunting over the lake on 19 September 2010 and there was one probable sighting of an osprey taking a fish in the northwest basin in the 1980s (Peter Roberts, personal communication). These were almost certainly passage migrants and fit with the pattern of occasional sightings on the great western lakes.

Buzzard

Peter Roberts of Kilkeeran reports seeing (and hearing) buzzards soaring overhead occasionally, especially in hot weather in August. This species is increasing its range in Ireland and will probably be seen more often in this area in the future.

Hen harrier

Occasional visitor throughout the year, but mostly in winter.

Marsh harrier

A female was seen hunting over the reedbeds near Kilkeeran on 31 May 2008 and again on 8 and 14 June 2008.

Sparrowhawk

Fairly common resident. One or two can usually be seen at the starling roost at Moorehall hunting low over the reeds just before dusk.

Kestrel

Not uncommon resident. Pairs have bred in recent years at Moorehall and Castleburke.

Merlin

While Ruttledge (1929) reported this species to be “Resident; frequents most bogs” in the area around Loughs Carra and Mask, it is certainly no longer resident near Lough Carra and has probably declined throughout the area. There is one record of a pair nesting on Castle Island in 1969 (Harrison, 1969). Each year since 2000, there are occasional sightings of single birds, but it is unlikely to be breeding in the area.

Hobby

There is one (reliable) record of an adult male of this species seen at Moorehall on 26 July 2007.

Peregrine

Occasional visitor throughout the year.

Red grouse

Now entirely absent from the region, but reported by Ruttledge to be “thinly distributed over most bogs”.

Grey partridge

Not recorded at all in recent years, and already declining in Ruttledge’s time, when he reported that “several were seen between Cloonee and Brownstown” in 1919.

Pheasant

Breeding and fairly common resident.

Water rail

Relatively common resident, but seen only infrequently. It occurs in most of the reedswamps, bogs and ungrazed fens around the lake.

Corncrake

In Ruttledge's time, this was a "fairly common summer visitor", but already he had noted a seeming decline in numbers in the 1920s. Now absent altogether, almost certainly due to changing land use practices and the intensification of agriculture.

Moorhen

A relatively uncommon resident and occasional winter visitor, with not much more than a handful of pairs around the whole lakeshore. It would be expected that Lough Carra would hold a large number of breeding pairs of this species, with birds congregating in flocks in winter to graze on lakeside pasture. The dearth of this species, in contrast to Ruttledge's "common" classification, seems almost certainly due to the presence of American mink.

Coot

Resident and breeding in small numbers (just a few pairs). Ruttledge reported that "in places quite a number may be seen together". Like the moorhen, this species has probably declined as a result of predation by American mink.

Crane

Ruttledge reports two seen near Lough Mask in 1884 (of which one was shot). Otherwise, this is not a species to be expected in the West of Ireland!

Oystercatcher

Ruttledge reported just one record of this species, of a flock of 15 flying over Lough Carra in July 1928. There has been one sighting in recent years of a single bird at Kilkeeran on 15 May 2005. It is known that they have at least attempted to breed on Lough Mask, but there has been no sign of this on Carra.

Ringed plover

Summer visitor which has bred in very small, and declining, numbers on the lakeshore. There was usually a pair at Moynish in the Partry House Estate, one or two pairs at Kilkeeran and occasionally a pair at other locations. However, none were

recorded during the breeding census transects (Partry and Kilkeeran) in 2012, suggesting that they have finally disappeared as a breeding species on the lake.

Golden plover

Winter visitor in variable numbers. Highest count in recent years was 706 in March 2004. The most favoured area around the lake seems to be the fen near Kilkeeran. Interestingly, much larger flocks of several thousands are sometimes seen at the nearby Carnacon lakes.

Lapwing

Very uncommon resident and winter visitor in variable numbers. Ruttledge recorded this as a common species, but changes in agriculture have probably reduced breeding numbers as now there are just occasional pairs in the fields around the lake. The highest count in recent winters was 393, but numbers fluctuate enormously and, as pointed out by Ruttledge, are probably related to the severity of the weather. The breeding season census results over the last ten years (see elsewhere on this website) show a substantial decline. Anecdotal evidence from Kilkeeran suggests a similar pattern of severely reduced numbers of breeding birds.

Dunlin

Although Ruttledge reported it to be an autumn passage migrant in small numbers, it is possible that it has bred locally. A few birds have been seen in recent years in suitable habitat near Kilkeeran in spring/early summer, including two on 15 May 2005. Also, five were recorded at Castleburke on 27 August 2003 and 12 were seen at Kilkeeran on 13 September 2003.

Jack snipe

Not recorded in recent years, although this might be an oversight. Ruttledge reported it to be a regular and quite plentiful winter visitor between October and April.

Snipe

Resident and breeding fairly commonly in bogs and marshy areas around the lake.

Woodcock

This species was reported by Ruttledge to be resident and nesting “commonly” in the district. In recent years, we have seen no evidence at all of breeding, although winter visitors are certainly still common.

Black-tailed godwit

Occasional passage migrant. Recent records include three at Moorehall on 31 August 2002 and six at Kilkeeran on 29 April 2005.

Whimbrel

Passage migrant in spring and autumn. Small flocks of up to around twenty birds are seen each year.

Curlew

Ruttledge reported it to be resident and breeding plentifully, with “enormous flocks” seen in autumn and winter. This species’ status has clearly declined as there are now very few, if any, breeding around Lough Carra and the maximum count in winters since 2000 has been 109. There is evidence to suggest that the population is continuing to decline (see the wildfowl count reports on this website) and it seems probable that agricultural practices are responsible. In particular, silage cutting probably reduces breeding success and slurry spreading probably reduces food supply (earthworms) in some areas. The species’ status around Lough Carra reflects that over Ireland as a whole.

Redshank

Relatively rare summer visitor, breeding in a few sites, with small numbers in winter, this species has probably declined since Ruttledge’s time as he recorded it to be a “Common resident”. The breeding bird census results confirm that numbers have declined over the last ten years.

Greenshank

Occasional passage migrant. One at Partry House Estate on 9 August 2003.

Wood sandpiper

Occasional passage migrant. One at Moorehall on 27 August 2003.

Common sandpiper

A few pairs nest around the lakeshore each year, perhaps as many as six or seven. Ruttledge reported that it was a “Regular summer visitor....frequenting almost every island.” This suggests that it is now less common.

Turnstone

Although Ruttledge suggested that this was “possibly an annual visitor to Loughs Mask and Carra”, there have been no recent records of this species on Lough Carra.

Arctic skua

Recorded by Ruttledge as a “passage migrant in autumn”, with around four reported between 1917 and 1921. Not seen recently.

Little gull

Rare visitor, with just one record of two seen on 17 March 2003 near Castle Carra.

Black-headed gull

Ruttledge reported this species to be “Resident, and breeds numerously on lake islands and bogs. Whilde et al. (1993) reported Lough Carra’s breeding populations to have been 3,341 in 1977, but only 252 in 1993. The remaining colony now is together with the common gulls on the island just south of the Kilkeeran peninsula. This has consisted of around 200-300 birds in recent years.

Common gull

Two breeding colonies remain, one on the islands off the south shore of the Kilkeeran peninsula, and one in the disused and flooded quarry to the West of the Kilkeeran peninsula. Between them, these two colonies have recently held around 115 birds and, in addition, there are a few sites around the lake where odd pairs nest. Illantrim Island, where Ruttledge recorded a colony, is no longer used.

In 1977, Lough Carra held a breeding population of 436, which had declined to 72 by 1993 (Whilde et al. 1993). Since then, there has obviously been a partial recovery of numbers. Possible explanations for these dramatic changes include predation by American mink, climate change and changing food supplies.

Lesser black-backed gull

Not recorded as breeding on Lough Carra, but occasional visitors are seen, perhaps from the colony on Lough Mask.

Herring gull

Not included in Ruttledge's list for Lough Carra, occasional individuals have been seen in recent years.

Glaucous gull

One was recorded during the January 1995 IWeBS count (Birdwatch Ireland, pers.comm.).

Great black-backed gull

Although Ruttledge had no record of this species, the fact that Whilde et al. (1993) report it breeding in small numbers on Mask in 1977 and 1993 suggests that it is established as an uncommon breeding bird in the area. They are seen occasionally on Lough Carra with up to 24 recorded on IWeBS counts in the 1990s, but there has been no sign of any breeding attempt.

Sandwich tern

One reported by Ruttledge in August 1928.

Common tern

Summer visitor in very small numbers, usually with a few pairs attempting nesting each year on small, isolated rocks. However, there has been no evidence of successful breeding in the last twelve years, and it seems likely that predation by American mink is the cause of this failure. Ruttledge noted that it was breeding on Lough Carra, but in decreasing numbers.

Arctic tern

Not recorded at all in recent years. Ruttledge reported it to be a regular visitor, but that even in 1929 it had already ceased to breed on Lough Carra.

Black tern

Listed by Ruttledge as a "rare visitor on autumn migration". Not recorded in recent years.

Stock dove

Reported by Ruttledge to have “first appeared in the district in 1919” and “evidently increasing”, this species seems to no longer occur in the area.

Woodpigeon

Resident and common. Ruttledge reported that “numbers increase in winter, when large flocks occur” and that it “constitutes a pest to farmers during harvest”. While small flocks of a dozen or so still occur, the almost total disappearance of tillage around the lake means that it no longer has the same food supply and is not an agricultural pest.

Collared dove

A relatively recent arrival in the West of Ireland, this species is now a well-established resident, occurring more or less exclusively around human habitation.

Cuckoo

Fairly common summer visitor.

Barn owl

Now a rare resident in the area around Lough Carra, it seems likely that this species has declined since Ruttledge’s time since he reported that it was “Resident, and to be found in suitable places within the district”. In 2011, two pairs bred successfully, one at Moorehall and the other at Castle Carra, raising three young between them. Although it is known to have bred on the Partry House Estate prior to 2001, it has not been seen there in recent years.

Long-eared owl

Rare resident, with a breeding pair present on the Partry House Estate in 2006 and 2007. It is not known whether the breeding attempt was successful. Occasional individuals are sighted in the woodlands around the lakeshore.

Swift

Regular, but not numerous summer visitor, often seen feeding over the water. There is a small colony of a few pairs (up to six) that has bred each year since 2001 (and possibly before) in the derelict Castle Burke.

Kingfisher

Rare resident. Seen occasionally on the lake itself, but more commonly seen along Annie's River and the small stream at Ballintubber.

Great-spotted woodpecker

A single bird was seen in the woodland at Moorehall on 25 May 2008, and was seen again (and identified as probable female) on 27 May 2008. Now that this species is breeding regularly in some numbers in the east of the country, it seems likely that they will eventually spread into the west. There is plenty of suitable habitat around the lake, so there is no reason why they should not become established if/when they reach this part of the country.

Skylark

Changing farming practices have probably reduced the population of this resident. Ruttledge reported it as "plentiful", but this certainly no longer applies. Nonetheless, around Lough Carra there are usually several pairs, especially on the grazed fens at Kilkeeran.

Sand martin

Common summer visitor, often seen feeding over the lake, even though no breeding colonies have been found close to the lake in recent years. There was a good colony in a sand cliff on the Western side of Lough Mask (which seems in 2012 to have disappeared) and it is also possible that there are small colonies in low, peat banks in cutover bog near Lough Carra since such sites have been seen in use elsewhere (such as North of Clogher, just a few mile from the lake).

In addition, large numbers (up to about 5,000) sometimes join the swallows in the reedbed roosts on Lough Carra in August and September.

Swallow

Very common summer visitor. Ruttledge (1929) makes no mention of reedbed roosts of this species and, since he spent much time on and around the lake, it must be concluded that the massive roosts now regularly seen each year are a relatively new phenomenon. Jonathan Shackleton also confirmed that he saw no such roosts in 1975 while carrying out survey work on the lake. The roosts consist of predominantly juvenile birds and begin to form in August, usually continuing right through September. The highest total estimated since 2001 was *c.* 20,000, making Lough Carra an extremely important site in this respect. Sometimes, there is a single roost in one location (very often at Moorehall) and at other times several different reedbeds around the lake may be used simultaneously. The birds often spend the hour or so

prior to roosting in feeding over the surface of the lake, including taking insects from the stands of bulrush that have proliferated in recent years.

House martin

Regular, but not numerous summer visitor. Not seen to join the communal reedbed roosts of the other hirundines (swallows and sand martins).

Meadow pipit

Fairly common resident, especially on the bogs and fens, although much reduced in numbers after the two extremely hard winters of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

Yellow wagtail

Now absent from the area, but recorded as breeding in small numbers at the end of the nineteenth century, including near Keel Bridge (Ruttledge, 1929).

Grey wagtail

Uncommon resident. Occasionally seen on the lakeshore, but more commonly encountered on the streams feeding the lake and on the Keel River where they have sometimes bred under the road bridge.

Pied wagtail

Common resident and seen in communal reedbed roosts of up to 120 birds in winter.

Wren

Very common resident.

Dunnock

Uncommon resident.

Robin

Prior to the two hard winters (2009/2010 and 2010/2011), this was an abundant resident, but numbers were drastically reduced by the extreme weather and, at the time of writing (2012) have yet to recover (see results of the breeding bird census elsewhere on this website).

Stonechat

Resident, but uncommon around the lake, being found mostly on the bogland to the east and the fens at Kilkeeran. This is another species whose numbers declined catastrophically during the two hard winters.

Northern wheatear

Passage migrant in small numbers and summer visitor, with confirmed breeding on the Kilkeeran peninsula in 2007.

Ring Ouzel

There is no record of this species in recent years, as expected. However, Ruttledge (1929) reported that one was seen near Lough Carra on 2 March 1924, perhaps having been driven down from the Partry mountains by heavy snowfalls.

Blackbird

Very common resident.

Fieldfare

Regular winter visitor in large numbers.

Song thrush

Now a relatively uncommon resident, having been drastically reduced in numbers by the two hard winters (see breeding bird census results elsewhere on this website).

Redwing

Regular winter visitor in large numbers.

Mistle thrush

Fairly common resident.

Grasshopper warbler

Uncommon, but regular summer visitor, breeding in marshes, fens, wet scrubland and thickets. Ruttledge (1929) had no record of this species in this area.

Sedge warbler

Fairly common summer visitor, breeding in the reedswamps, marshes, fens and wet scrubland.

Whitethroat

Fairly common summer visitor, breeding in areas with gorse or scrub.

Blackcap

Now a very common summer visitor, with several pairs breeding in each of the major woodlands around the lake (see the data from annual breeding bird censuses elsewhere on this website). Also, occasionally present in winter. In 1929, Ruttledge reported that it was “possibly an annual summer visitor”, but by 1983 it was clearly becoming established as a breeding species in Co. Mayo (Ruttledge, 1983).

Chiffchaff

Summer visitor in relatively small numbers. Ruttledge (1929) mentions having “seen literally swarms of them in August in thickets bordering the lakes”, but they are certainly not very numerous around Lough Carra.

Willow warbler

Very common summer visitor.

Wood warbler

Rare summer visitor, first recorded on two occasions (singing male) in the Doon peninsula woodlands in 2011, with a repeat record in April 2012.

Goldcrest

Common resident, breeding in both the coniferous plantations and in deciduous woodlands around the lake.

Spotted flycatcher

Uncommon summer visitor with perhaps one or two pairs breeding each year. Occasionally seen in small family parties in summer on woodland edges (e.g. Partry House Estate on 25 July 2003). Ruttledge (1929) reported that it was a regular summer visitor and that Derrinrush was “a favourite resort”. It seems probable that the numbers of this species have declined since that time.

Long-tailed tit

Not uncommon resident.

Coal tit

Very common resident.

Blue tit

Very common resident.

Great tit

Very common resident.

Treecreeper

Uncommon resident. Recorded in recent years in the woodlands at Partry House Estate, Doon peninsula and Moorehall.

Jay

Not recorded at all by Ruttledge, but now not infrequently seen (or heard) in the woodlands around the lakeshore, especially on the Partry House Estate, the Doon peninsula, at Moorehall and Derrinrush. There are probably three or four pairs breeding around the lake.

Magpie

Common resident.

Jackdaw

Common resident.

Rook

Resident. There is a small rookery on Gleneary island with about 15 occupied nests in recent years. Ruttledge noted that the species “has increased of recent years to the dimensions of a plague”. The decline in tillage around the lake may have been paralleled by a decrease in rook numbers, although they are still abundant and often seen in large flocks on fields where slurry has been spread.

Hooded crow

Resident. Several pairs breed around the lake, often on the islands where a suitable tree is available.

Raven

Resident. At least one pair breeds in mature trees in woodland on the Partry House Estate, and there may be another pair or two in other woodlands around the lake. In winter and early spring they are often seen over and around the lake in small numbers, so there has clearly been an increase since Ruttledge’s time when none had been seen on Lough Carra.

Starling

Common resident. The reedbeds around the lake hold communal roosts of this species from August right through the winter. Up to c. 60,000 birds have been estimated in one roost. The reedbeds most commonly used by large numbers are at Moorehall and Castleburke. Ruttledge (1929) makes no mention of such roosts, and Jonathan Shackelton (who surveyed vegetation and other aspects of the lake) has informed that he saw no such roosts in 1975 either.

House sparrow

Resident and locally common.

Chaffinch

Resident and abundant.

Greenfinch

Resident and fairly common.

Goldfinch

Resident and common, forming flocks in winter of up to 30 or 40 birds.

Siskin

Winter visitor and passage migrant in small numbers. Not recorded by Ruttledge. Probably now also breeding since this has been confirmed just a few kilometres north of the lake (at Carrajames).

Linnet

Resident and fairly common.

Twite

Ruttledge reported that it was resident and “most commonly met with in the western part of the district , though I have met with it sparingly on the eastern bogs”. Not recorded at all in recent years.

Redpoll

Resident and fairly common.

Crossbill

One record in recent years of 15 seen feeding in Scot’s pine on the Partry House Estate on 5 May, 2002.

Bullfinch

Resident and breeding fairly commonly. Often seen on woodland edges and along roadside hedges.

Snow bunting

Ruttledge reported one sighting just West of Lough Carra with a flock of finches.

Yellowhammer

Ruttledge reported this species to be “Resident, widespread and very common”. It has since disappeared completely from the area. Changing agricultural practices (loss of grain crops and conversion to improved grassland) are almost certainly the sole cause.

Corn bunting

Not recorded at all in recent years, but noted by Ruttledge as being “Decidedly local”. The cessation of tillage and crops of oats and barley in the area will probably have been responsible for its disappearance.

Reed bunting

A common resident and breeding bird, but also a winter visitor to the area in some numbers. Although a few miles from Lough Carra, flocks of up to around 200 have been seen on cutover bog near Clogher in recent years.

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